FCND DISCUSSION PAPER NO. 56

HOW DOES THE HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE HELP TO SHAPE THE FOOD AND NUTRITION POLICY RESEARCH AGENDA?

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February 1999

ABSTRACT

Food as a human right was first laid down 50 years ago in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The last 10 years, in particular, have witnessed an increased recognition of the importance of the human rights approach for designing policies and interventions that promote food and nutrition security, as evidenced by the highly visible role given to human rights at the 1996 World Food Summit. But, given that the design of effective policies and interventions is based on good analysis and information, what are the implications of the human rights approach for the food and nutrition policy research agenda? This is the question we address in this paper. We note several implications of the human rights perspective in terms of (1) new research areas, (2) new perspectives on old issues, and (3) implications for research methods.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Bonnie McClafferty and Tim Frankenberger for their comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper. All remaining errors are ours.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition have increasingly come under the human rights lens in the past decade (Oshaug, Barth Eide, and Eide 1994; Jonsson 1995; *Food Policy* 1996; Short 1997). Food as a human right was first laid down 50 years ago in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, and further specified in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights of 1966. Commitments made by the U.N. member nations at the World Food Summit of 1996 that recognized the realization of human rights as an important way of achieving food security further signaled improved international openness to the human rights perspective (World Alliance for Nutrition and Human Rights 1998).

In terms of promoting food and nutrition security, it is argued that the human rights perspective can, among other things, (1) provide food and nutrition policymakers with increased leverage in the battle to prioritize food and nutrition issues higher in public spending allocations (Oshaug, Barth Eide, and Eide 1994), (2) lead to a greater appreciation of the integrated nature of approaches to overcoming food insecurity and malnutrition (Oshaug, Barth Eide, and Eide 1994), (3) result in a better synergism between process-oriented and outcome-oriented development approaches (Jonsson 1995, 1996), (4) unlock existing resources for the fight against malnutrition (Robertson 1996), and (5) provide "minimum moral standards and targets for humanitarian relief" (Marchione 1996, 99).

But what of food and nutrition policy research? Policy research is one of the factors that can influence the way governments, multilaterals, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and academics think and behave. Here is another way in which the human rights approach can influence food and nutrition policy formulation—but what can policy analysts take away from this debate? In short, what can or should they be doing differently?

This is the question addressed in this paper. First, Section 2 reviews the human rights approach, especially as it pertains to food and nutrition issues. The approach has some fairly straightforward, but overlooked, implications for the food and nutrition research community in terms of the identification of new research issues—some of these are discussed in Section 3 of this paper. Section 4 discusses a more subtle, but perhaps more important, question: How can the human rights approach help us to throw new light on mature research issues? In addition to what is researched and the perspective from which it is approached, there is the question of how is that research conducted. Section 5 provides some examples of what the human rights approach has to say about this. Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. THE HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH

The concept of "freedom from want," which underlies much of the "food and nutrition as a human right," movement has a distinguished political history. In 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered his "Four Freedoms" speech before the

U.S. Congress. In that speech, he called for "a world founded upon four essential human freedoms." The four freedoms were freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom of fear of physical aggression, and freedom from want. On freedom from want, Roosevelt stated "freedom from want—which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings that will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants—everywhere in the world" (MacGregor Burns 1996, 203). This speech strongly influenced the language and intent of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948 (Oshaug, Eide, and Eide 1994). In subsequent years, the UDHR has been influential in the food and nutrition arena in a number of ways—the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN General Assembly with a specific focus on the welfare of children, is a prime example of a key UN document building on the UDHR.

Essentially, human rights are the relationships between claim holders and duty bearers (World Alliance for Nutrition and Human Rights 1998). Bearers have a duty to *respect, protect, facilitate,* and *fulfil* the rights of the claim holders. Claimants have valid claims. Bearers and claimants can be the international community, national and local governments, NGOs, communities, families, households, and parents. Some of the most interesting and important research issues emerge when the bearers and the claimants have competing and potentially noncompatible rights.

Examples of the ways in which governments uphold human rights include (1) their respect for customary rights to land and other resources, (2) the protection they provide against discrimination, (3) the facilitation of improved knowledge through research and technology, and (4) the fulfilment of the desire of citizens for participation in the design and implementation of policies and programs. Several examples of how each of these types of involvement is important for food and nutrition policy are presented in Oshaug, Eide, and Eide (1994).

While there is no necessary relationship, the government's respect for human rights is more likely to be enhanced within a democratic system of government. Democratic government is more likely to be accountable for its action through openness and freedom of expression. If a country has free and fair multiparty elections on a regular basis, the elected government is likely to be accountable to the people and people are entitled to participate in that government. The existence of democratic institutions is more likely to be a good indicator as to the strength of political rights, and perhaps civil rights. In addition to being an end in itself, many assert that respect for human rights leads to improved economic and social performance (Dasgupta 1993). Moreover, they claim that when this performance lags, there is pressure on governments to resign, to redesign policies, or to repress rights, depending on the degree of democratization (Sen 1995). This points to the close connection between civil and political rights on one side, and economic, social, and cultural rights on the other.

The above perspective has several implications for food and nutrition policy research. *First*, the probable link between an adherence to human rights and the strength of democratic institutions provides us with a window into the issue of human rights, democracy, and economic performance at the cross-national, national, and project levels. *Second*, the same link allows us to examine reverse causality, namely that between subsistence deprivation, civil unrest, and the subsequent extent of adherence to civil rights. *Third*, the human rights emphasis on participation has some obvious implications for studying the role of participation in project design and its impact on project performance. *Fourth*, can either the bearer-claimant framework or the "respect, protect, facilitate, and fulfill" approach cast new light on some well-known policy and program research issues? *Finally*, what are the implications of the human rights framework for research methods and the research process? These five sets of issues are dealt with by this paper in three sections: (1) new policy research issues, (2) new light that is shed on existing food and nutrition policy research issues, and (3) implications for research methods.

3. NEW POLICY RESEARCH ISSUES RAISED BY THE HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH

This section introduces several issues that might not immediately come to mind when thinking of food and nutrition policy research. The human rights approach not only

forces us to think more carefully about these issues, but suggests that there may be a high payoff to doing so.

THE IMPACT OF HUMAN RIGHTS ON POVERTY, FOOD, AND NUTRITION SECURITY

The assertion that human rights are important for the achievement of food security is not new. Numerous case studies (from Guatemala and South Africa, for example) illustrate that those denied civil liberties suffer disproportionately from social injustices, including hunger-related diseases, mortality, and food insecurity (Heggenhoughen 1995). Moreover, the significance of freedom of speech, free press, and freedom of assembly for the protection of economic and social rights, including the right to food, has been amply illustrated from India and certain African nations (Messer 1994; Drèze and Sen 1989; Howard 1986).

Can the case study approach be complemented by a more quantitative or "economistic" approach? The entry point for us here is the "democracy and economic growth" literature. These studies typically treat democracy and the adherence to political and civil rights as one and the same—both conceptually and through measurement (Taylor and Jodice 1983; Dasgupta 1993; de Haan and Siermann 1995). Democracy indices are based on assessments of the extent of countries' adherence to civil and political rights over time. Several indices are available (see Table 1).

Table 1 A summary of selected studies of the impact of governance/democracy on economic growth

Study	Outcome variable	Good governance variable (original source)	Impact of governance variable on outcome variable
Dasgupta 1993 Clarendon Press	life expectancy, adult literacy, pc gross national income, infant mortality rate	Political rights index (Taylor and Jodice 1983), Civil rights index (Taylor and Jodice (1983)	no regression analysis, but simple correlation coefficients political and civil rights indices significantly and positively correlated with national income, declines in infant mortality, increases in life expectancy, and *declines* in literacy
Scully 1988 *JPE*	pc growth rate of GDP	Political liberty (Gastil 1982), Civil liberty (Gastil 1982), Economic liberty (Gastil 1982)	"politically open societies which bind themselves to the rule of law to private property and to the market allocation of resources grow at three times the rate....of societies in which these freedoms are circumscribed or proscribed" p.661
Weede 1983 *Kyklos*	pc gross national product	Political democracy (electoral process, freedom of press, political liberties) (Bollen 1980)	"the overall effect of political democracy on economic growth is negative, but rather weak" p. 35
Bilson 1982 *Kyklos*	pc real income	Civil liberties index (Gastil 1978)	"the model suggests that a 10 percent increase in per capita real income will reduce the civil liberties index by 0.1" p. 107
Goldsmith 1995 *JDS*	growth rate in GDP	Political rights index (Freedom House 1993) Property rights index (Johnson and Sheehy 1995)	"taken together the regression results do back the view that political rights and property rights enhance economic growth in third and second world countries" p. 167.
Pastor and Sung 1995 *J.Econ* Issues	private investment as a share of GDP	Degree of democracy (Gurr 1990)	pooled time series for 15 developing countries. "the democracy measure is positive and significant in a very diverse country set and over several different specifications...and in either ordinary least squares-dummy variables or random effects regressions" p. 239.
Alesina et al. 1996 *J. Econ Growth*	annual rate of growth of pc GDP	Political stability (Taylor and Jodice 1983) Democracy (by authors from Banks (Political Handbook of the World, various issues)	developed and developing, no FSU countries "political instability reduces growth...To some extent and with some caveats we also find that low growth increases the likelihood of government turnover, particularly in the case of coups d'etat" p. 205.
Perotti 1996 *J. Econ. Growth*	average annual growth rate of pc GDP, 1960-85	Democracy (Jodice and Taylor 1988)	"there is some indication that the association between equality and growth is stronger in democracies; however the democracy effect does not seem to be very robust" p. 168
de Haan and Siermann 1995 *Public Choice*	average annual growth rate of pc GDP, 1961-1992	Democracy (author's measure based on Gasiorowski 1993)	"the relationship between democracy and economic growth is not robust....we think that our evidence clearly points in the direction that political and civil rights perhaps do not improve a country's growth rate, at least they do not impede it...when a country seeks a high level of economic growth it is not appropriate to adopt a policy in which democratic rights are repressed. This interpretation offers at least some consolation to those who value democracy and human rights as ends in themselves" p. 193

A fairly large literature has emerged that takes advantage of these data by incorporating them into econometric models that aim to explain the causes of economic growth. This literature has appeared largely outside of the development journals (Fedderke and Klitgaard [1998] being a recent exception). Table 1 summarizes the literature on the empirical importance of democracy for economic growth, over and above other factors such as investment, human capital, the share of exports in GNP, inflation, and population growth rates. The studies use data from different countries and years and use different definitions of democracy. The studies from the 1990s are the most sophisticated in terms of measurement, data, and statistical methods employed, and they mostly demonstrate a positive impact of democracy on economic growth. de Haan and Siermann's (1995, 193) conclusion from their study provides a conservative summing up of the literature: "our evidence clearly points in the direction that if political and civil rights perhaps do not improve a country's growth rate, at least they do not impede it." Goldsmith (1995) and Pastor and Sung (1995) draw much more positive conclusions from their studies, as quoted in Table 1.

Fewer cross-country studies with food security and nutrition as outcome variables have been undertaken, but data are becoming more available to do these kinds of analyses—and when they are undertaken, they should incorporate with rights and democracy variables. A recent study by Smith and Haddad (1998) is encouraging in this regard. This cross-country econometric study finds that democracy (as proxied by the political rights and civil liberties data from Freedom House [1998]) has a strong positive

impact on child nutrition, particularly in South Asia, East Asia, and the North Africa and Near East regions. How do these economic growth and child growth effects work? A number of theories have been proposed, each of which deserves more attention.

Enhanced property rights. The incentives to invest in a resource are severely diminished if the gains from investment cannot be retained, nor the resource sold. At the national level, economic historians suggest that a crucial part of Europe's "exceptionalism"—an exceptionalism that helped it grow more quickly than countries in other continents—was the existence of institutions that promoted the respect for and protection of property rights (Landes 1998). Landes argues that this respect for the people's needs derived from the fragmentation of Europe during medieval times. This fragmentation, normally considered undesirable, was "the strongest brake on wilful, oppressive behaviour" on the part of governments and rulers.

At the intrahousehold level, many societies give the rights of women less importance than the rights of men. In most societies, an asymmetry in rights exists: women have less access to property rights, information, education, their own time, resources, and opportunities. By violating the human rights of women (and children), these societies are, in effect, throwing away a large segment of the entrepreneurial talent pool. Hence it should not be surprising to find that the perpetuation of these asymmetries incurs an economic and child growth cost. It is

difficult to quantify these costs for a number of technical reasons related to measurement and modeling problems; nevertheless, the available evidence suggests that these costs are significant (Haddad, Hoddinott, and Alderman 1997).

Better and more accessible information. On the impact of adherence to human rights on food and nutrition status, the literature again tends to focus on civil and political rights. Perhaps one of the first explicit connections made in this regard was by Sen. He reminds us of his earlier work when he states (1995, 26) "no substantial famine has ever occurred in any country with democracy and independence and a relatively free press." Sen also makes the point that democratically elected governments have political incentives as well as moral obligations to prevent catastrophes such as famines. The recent famine in North Korea reminds us of the close relationship between civil and political rights on the one hand, and economic, social, and cultural rights on the other. A free press that could openly report on the food, nutrition, and health situation in the country would undoubtably have helped to ameliorate the present crisis.

Human rights as a political lever. One of the arguments made in favor of the human rights approach to reducing food insecurity and malnutrition is that it provides one more tool to move nutrition higher up the development agenda. As far as we are aware, there has been no qualitative or quantitative test of this thesis, nor, in fact,

> any analysis of why nutrition is taken more seriously in the budgets of some governments than in the budgets of others. This is surely an important area for future research: what do policymakers (and not just Ministers of Agriculture and Health) need to move food and nutrition higher up the agenda and if they had it, when would they use it? A series of case studies from North-West Europe is instructive in this regard. James, Ralph, and Bellizi (1997) explore the evolution of nutrition and health policies in a number of countries from this region. They conclude that "dietary change and health gains come first from campaigning experts departing from their usual private research and teaching endeavors. Governmental organized effort usually comes much later" (p. S18).

THE IMPACT OF POVERTY, FOOD INSECURITY, AND MALNUTRITION ON THE ADHERENCE TO HUMAN RIGHTS

If there is some evidence that adherence to human rights promotes economic growth and food and nutrition security, what of the reverse relationship? That is, do poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition cause human rights to be diminished? There is certainly evidence that short-run economic decline makes people less likely to tolerate incumbent governments. The extent of the government's respect for human rights will condition its response. In democratic countries, governments will try to respond to the desires of the people or perhaps they will resign if they feel that they no longer have credibility. In less democratic countries, the government is more likely to appease or

repress. Repression inevitably means a diminution of human rights. Failure of a government to respond adequately can lead to violence and a further diminution of rights.

A study by Collier and Hoeffler (1997) investigates the economic causes of civil wars over the 1960-1992 period with data from 98 developed and developing countries. Using cross-country regression methods and a series of variables that include values from 1960 for population growth and density, income inequality, and years since independence, they conclude that the four key factors predicting the occurrence and duration of civil war are the 1960 values of per capita income (purchasing power parity adjusted), the size of the natural resource base, the extent of ethnic and linguistic fractionalization, and population size. They interpret the effect of higher income in discouraging civil war as being through the higher opportunity cost of rebellion—a high income population has more to lose due to civil war. But if the explanation leaves us wanting (surely it is some combination of income level and income inequality that drives this type of argument?), the empirical results lead to questions as to whether it is poverty or food insecurity or malnutrition that is the most sensitive trigger of civil unrest. For example, drawing on case studies, Messer, Cohen, and D'Costa (1998) conclude that food subsistence crises were the triggers for civil wars in the last decade in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Rwanda.

Political economy questions are also important here. Can price increases cause riots? Certainly. Look at some of the countries of North Africa (Bienen and Gersovitz 1986). How important are these fears in slowing down the liberalization and

democratization process? How accurate are governments in identifying the trigger points for civil unrest and how accurate do they want to be? It might, for example, be quite convenient for a government to appeal to civil unrest worries as a reason for not implementing reforms. More studies can and should be done on the political economy of food and nutrition policy, particularly in mapping out the overlap of technocratically feasible policy options with what is possible (and what is perceived to be possible) both administratively and politically (see Gutner, Gomaa, and Nasser [1998] for such a study in the context of Egyptian food subsidies).

Note, however, that civil unrest is not necessarily bad for human rights in the long run (just look at the French and American Revolutions). The recent events in Indonesia might provide another example of how short-term unrest leads to a strengthening rather than a diminution of rights. The recent sharp decline in real wages in Indonesia triggered violent protest against the government and its opinions on the virtues of democratic governance. When economic growth is strong, such opinions might be tolerated. But not so during a sharp decline in living standards.[1] Many observers will be paying close attention to whether human rights worsen or improve in the short-to-medium term.

Civil unrest is typically bad for capital formation in the short and medium run, leading to the destruction of its many forms: human, physical, natural, and financial. It also destroys social capital. Social capital is a new catch-phrase in the economics

[1] In this case, the Indonesian government has responded by installing the Vice President as President. There is talk of elections in 1 to 2 years.

literature, but it is not new in the anthropology and sociology literatures (see Coleman 1988 for a review). The entry point for many economists is the book on Italian regional economic performance by Putnam (1993) and the “Bowling Alone” article by Putnam (1995). The latter article states that "social capital refers to features of social organisation such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit."

Social capital is manifest in networks of civic engagement that foster norms of reciprocity and social trust that facilitates communication, coordination, amplifies reputations, and allows "dilemmas of collective action to be resolved." As such, it is hypothesized to be the basis of exchange for mutual benefit. Without trust and networks, the thesis continues, entrepreneurial spirit finds it harder to thrive, and further development is stifled.

We bring social capital in here, not simply because it is a form of capital, but rather because it is a form of capital that seems to be intimately bound up in good governance and a respect for human rights. Does good governance lead to more social capital or vice versa or both? This is not yet clear and remains a matter of some controversy. Social capital might simply reflect good governance rather than cause it. Moreover, not all social capital is “good”—think of drug gangs and the Mafia (Harriss and de Renzio 1997).

Putnam (1993) clearly thinks that the views of political leaders as to the "wisdom of the ordinary citizen" (p. 102) are crucial in building up social capital. Do leaders think

that (1) people should be permitted to vote even if they cannot do so intelligently, (2) few people really know what is in their best interests in the long run, (3) certain people are better qualified to lead this country because of their traditions and family background, and (4) it will always be necessary to have a few strong, able individuals who know how to take charge? The questions and the answers they solicit are reminiscent of the human rights framework of respect, protect, facilitate and fulfil, and doubtless would be extremely revealing of the political leadership's attitude towards the rights of their citizens.[2]

Nutritionists and lawyers have stressed the importance of building human resources as part of the social capital for promoting food and nutrition rights (Eide, Alfredsson, and Oshaug 1996). On the other hand, economists have been less concerned about the question of how to build up social capital and preserve it, but more with questions pertaining to whether it is worth building up in the first place. The two main examples by economists in measuring social capital and incorporating it into income-generation models are represented by Knack and Keefer (1997) at the cross-country level and by Narayan and Pritchett (1997) at the household level. Both find positive impacts of social capital on economic growth, controlling for income and a host of other factors. Both of these studies need to be built upon in terms of better operationalizing different types of social capital, better validating the measure with qualitative studies in the same area,

[2] If governments can stimulate the build up of social capital, they can also cause it to come crashing down. Fukuyama (1995) asserts that "social capital. . .can be dissipated by the actions of governments much more readily than those governments can build it up again" (p. 362).

improving our ability to determine the direction of causality, and in understanding the role of public policy in its accumulation, but the studies represent important first steps.

THE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION

As noted in Section 2, one of the ways in which governments can contribute to the fulfilment of food as a human right is through the participation of communities in the design and implementation of policies and programs.

Research on whether the design of food and nutrition programs takes into account the preferences of beneficiaries is rare. One example comes from a review of public works programs in Ethiopia by Webb et al. (1994). The study concludes that while most public works-type projects are based on soil conservation or reforestation objectives, the activities are among the least desired by the participants themselves. The study finds that the participants most desire public works projects that are related to health and sanitation, such as health clinic construction, piped water, and latrine building.

On the other hand, the payoff to beneficiary participation has been poorly measured. One of the first studies to address the question as to whether participation improves performance is by Isham, Narayan, and Pritchett (1995). Using a range of performance indicators for 121 rural water projects from 49 countries, Isham, Narayan, and Pritchett (1995) found econometric evidence that participation of beneficiaries (based on indicators from consultation and shared decisionmaking to exclusive participant decisionmaking) was strongly correlated with performance. In conclusion, they note that

this result may not hold outside of the water sector, nor is it clear how policy can provide incentives to stimulate participation, and whether the benefits of participation outweigh the costs. These are certainly researchable issues for the next generation of food and nutrition studies.

4. IS NEW LIGHT THROWN ON EXISTING ISSUES?

One of the sternest tests of new approaches is the extent to which they can shed new light on existing research issues. This section views four food and nutrition policy issues through a human rights lens and asks what new insights are unearthed as a result?

PROTECTING AGAINST GENDER DISCRIMINATION

As highlighted above, tolerating gender asymmetries in access to resources amounts to discounting a considerable part of the available talent pool and is bound to result in losses in productivity. Some of the clearest evidence on this is found in the agricultural literature. Work by Udry et al. (1995), Tibaijuka (1994), and Quisumbing (1994) indicates significant potential gains in agricultural productivity and in the viability of countless agricultural project investments from a reduction in these asymmetries.

But how to reduce these asymmetries? One approach is to improve the supply of resources and information in the hands of women. Another approach is to increase the claims that women might have access to, regardless of whether they take up the claim or not. Examples of such increases in claims might be changes to traditional or formal rules

and legislation that determine asset and income distribution upon household dissolution. Other examples include changes in female access and use of common property (Maggs and Hoddinott 1997) and changes in the targeting of child benefit transfers (Lundberg, Pollak, and Wales 1997). How can changes in resources that women have a claim to—but do not necessarily use—affect a woman's ability to increase her voice in decisionmaking and reduce the asymmetries she faces? A class of collective household models (Nash-bargaining models that are more general than the unitary model typically used by economists) allows for the impact of extrahousehold parameters to affect an individual's fallback position should a household split up (McElory 1997). These extrahousehold parameters can consist of many things, including the claims of men and women to resources. For example, an analysis by Hoddinott and Adam (1998) examines the impact of a change in Canadian state law regarding the dispensation of income and assets upon divorce. The law change improved the likelihood of women receiving a larger share of such resources. Using changes in female suicide rates as the welfare outcome, the study found a significant drop in female suicide rates immediately after the regime change.

The human rights approach reminds us that claims—whether or not they are acted upon—can be a powerful and unobtrusive lever through which to improve gender equity in both welfare outcomes and in access to resources.

PROTECTING AND PROMOTING DIETARY DIVERSITY

A frequent criticism of agricultural technology is that it has led to a loss in people's ability to access a diverse diet. Diet diversity is important from a nutritional point of view—a wider variety of foods consumed typically means a diet richer in essential nutrients (Hatløy and Oshaug 1998). Diverse diets have been shown to protect against chronic diseases (La Vecchia et al. 1997; Slattery et al. 1997), prolong longevity (Kant, Scharzkin, and Ziegler 1995), and improve the general health status (Drewnowski et al. 1997).

Agricultural technology, if productivity enhancing (its raison d'être), can affect diet diversity in a number of ways: (1) through affecting the income of farmers (better-off individuals buy more varied diets), (2) through affecting the income of off-farm rural manufacturers and providers, (3) through altering the cost of food to urban consumers which in turn affects the availability of income for other food purchases, and (4) through changing the number of species of food available for farmers to cultivate and for consumers to eat. The effects in (1) through (3) have proven to be positive and rather large (Hazell and Ramasamy 1991; Lipton and Longhurst 1989; von Braun and Kennedy 1994; Delgado, Hopkins, and Kelly 1998). The effects under (4) have not been measured and need to be.

One of the few studies to examine the impacts of the green revolution agricultural technology on genetic erosion (a loss of genetic material) has been conducted by Smale (1997). She examines this link in the context of leading wheat cultivars. Using data from

Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maiz y Trigo (CIMMYT) databases and elsewhere, she cannot establish a relationship between the adoption of green revolution technology and genetic erosion.

If genetic erosion has occurred, this clearly raises the question of how to value the rights of the current generation to freedom from hunger and malnutrition versus the freedoms of future generations for whom genetic erosion may limit options (Serageldin 1997). For now, there is the hope that technology, suitably guided by sustainability concerns, will be able to protect us from having to make drastic choices between the rights of the living and the yet unborn.[3]

FACILITATING THE ABILITY OF ADULTS TO WORK AND TAKE ADEQUATE CARE OF CHILDREN

The proportion of women in the labor force in developing countries is increasing (UNDP 1997). However, women's labor force participation—particularly in urban areas—implies a separation of dwelling location and work location and this means trade-offs between time spent in income generation and time spent in food preparation and child care (Haddad, Ruel, and Garrett 1998). The human rights approach clearly articulates the claims that children have in terms of adequate care from their parents and other caregivers (Ramalingaswami, Jonsson, and Rohde 1997). Usually the caretakers are the mothers or other women in the children's family. Women also have a right to work

[3] Indeed, one could make the argument that the very concept of sustainability is a key embodiment of the human rights approach.

and to earn income that will benefit her children through increased purchases of food and health care. In the 1980s and early 1990s the debate on this issue was very much along the lines of "what is the net benefit/cost to the child of the mother working?" (Leslie 1988). But a human rights approach, rather than only argue over the extent of the trade-offs for the child, would stress more that mothers should be helped in their attempts to overcome these trade-offs by, for example, promoting the provision of child care arrangements.

One example of such success story comes from Mauritius. Increasing female employment in Mauritius (employment of mothers has gone from 20 percent in 1983 to almost 50 percent today) has created a demand for child care that cannot be met by extended families. As a response to the lack of nonfamily child care provision, the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare, initiated five day-care centers for children of 3 to 36 months of age. The centers are funded by employees, employers, and the government (Coletta and Reinhold 1997). How was the initiative developed? When are initiatives such as this replicable? When should it be replicated? These are the kind of questions that need to be asked in a wide variety of countries.

FULFILLING THE RIGHT TO RELIEF OF THOSE UNABLE TO PROVIDE FOR THEMSELVES

Donors, NGOs, governments (and even research institutes) find themselves under increased pressure to demonstrate impact. In general, the tying of performance to new or continued financial support makes a good deal of sense. However, there could be some

unanticipated and unwelcome consequences. Take, for example, the NGO that has to demonstrate impact in order to obtain funding one year later. The NGO operates a targeted intervention. There is obviously a temptation for that NGO and other organizations operating such targeted programs to avoid the remotest areas where it might be hardest to have an impact or to demonstrate an impact.

The human rights approach reminds us that the poorest citizens have the right to receive help, in an environment where the very survival of safety nets is often predicated on the ability of the safety nets to help the middle class as well, due to the political strength of this group. Barr (1992), in particular, is eloquent on the tension inherent in safety net design due to the dual demands of serving the poorest through relief and assistance activities and serving the middle class through income smoothing and protecting against uninsurable risks. The tensions and trade-offs between the rights of these income groups is particularly apparent during times of crisis and in time of cuts in safety net expenditures, although they need not be (Haddad and Zeller 1997). Additionally, in an era of increasing globalization, the performance of domestic institutions might be the difference between whether growth or disruption is the main outcome of the opening up of economies. And as Rodrik (1998) has argued, the respect for civil and political liberties and the design of safety nets are likely to be crucial components of domestic institutional performance.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH FOR THE RESEARCH PROCESS

In addition to raising new issues and making us think in new ways about old ones, the human rights approach might have something to say about the methods researchers typically use to frame and study the issues. Are there any research processes that the human rights approach forces us to reconsider? We briefly discuss three such processes in this section.

RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIALS

The central feature of randomized controlled trials is the random allocation of an intervention in a double blind manner (that is, neither the subject nor those administering the intervention know which group the subject belongs to). There is a large literature on the ethics of randomization. Examples of ethical issues raised by randomized controlled trials include the following.

1. Do the subjects understand the nature of the trial? Do they understand that treatment is allocated randomly and do they understand the reasons for the randomness (Snowdon, Garcia, and Elbourne 1997)?
2. Can the population on which the intervention is being tested actually afford to purchase the intervention should it prove to be effective (Cooper 1997)?

3. When is the use of a placebo group (as opposed to a different treatment) warranted (Semba 1997)?

A central point in the debate is whether ethics review committees should work to a common standard—irrespective of their location and irrespective of the ability of the health care system to support the best known treatment options for both treatment and control groups. Those who argue that they should claim that to do otherwise is to have one set of rights and ethics for the poor and one set for the rich. Those who argue that each case should be decided on its merits claim that it is unlikely that interventions such as oral rehydration therapy would have been as widely adopted were they to have been subjected to such absolute standards. The issue would seem to revolve around whether it is the best known or simply the best available treatments that should be used.

It is not clear to us exactly how the human rights agenda has or will influence this particular debate, only that it has the potential to do so. We note, however, that it is awkward to use an absolute standard when persuading governments to further respect the rights of their people to food and nutrition and a less than absolute standard when conducting randomized control trials in developing countries.

PARTICIPATION

One of the obligations governments have under the human rights agenda is the fulfilment of the desire of citizens for participation in the design and implementation of

policies and programs. In so far as design and implementation are based on research (specifically, hypothesis development, data collection, and analysis), the human rights approach will place a greater emphasis on the participation of the intended clients (the poor) in the research process.

It is not news that the poor have an enormous reservoir of knowledge about the problems they face, the constraints they encounter, and the potential solutions that need to be explored. The work from Palanpur in India, comparing survey-based estimates of household income with local perceptions of income for the same set of households, demonstrated the clumsiness of standard survey-based consumption methods, particularly in a snapshot setting (Lanjouw and Stern 1991).

The food and nutrition policy research community is moving in this direction (see Maxwell 1998; Bergeron, Morris, and Median Banegas 1998), but slowly. Some qualitative research methods—often wrongly described as participatory—have been found to be no more empowering of the communities than more conventional quantitative survey methods (Chung et al. 1997). In retrospect, this is not surprising, given that the agenda is still that of the researcher. To be truly participatory, researchers need to participate in the poor's inquiry and analysis process, not vice versa. This is difficult for most researchers, particularly for those professionals in disciplines that train their students to quickly focus in on a series of testable hypotheses that are generated by a particular theoretical model. On a more practical level, it is our experience that it is

sometimes more difficult to secure funding for such open-ended activities, but perhaps this, too, will change in the coming years.

INSTITUTIONS

Human rights approaches place emphasis on government obligations and remind us that governments and other institutions have values too. Thus, it is important to understand the processes by which institutions make decisions: How important are economic, political, and ethical values? Work by Klitgaard (1997) and others outlines the unanticipated consequences that may occur due to a failure to consider institutional incentives, values, and capacity in project and policy design. In economics, conventional empirical work in this area is limited (Hodgson 1998). Empirical work is difficult due to political and institutional sensitivities, but in the context of food subsidy system reform, for example, it is essential to know what options are currently on and off the table and which lobby groups influence that mapping. Lobby groups can and should be surveyed by researchers in an attempt to understand the determinants of government decisionmaking. Household questionnaires that ask about sensitive topics such as savings, income, and family planning are surely able to solicit opinions on the types of subsidy change the clients themselves would most like to see. Food and nutrition policy

researchers need to go beyond the household and community and be more creative in the selection of units of observation to which questionnaires are administered.[4]

6. CONCLUSIONS

The introduction to this paper poses the question: What can food and nutrition policy analysts take away from the human rights approach? We have presented three broad ways in which we feel that a greater consciousness about the human rights debate can influence food and nutrition research. First, there is the potential for an explicit linking of democracy and food and nutrition security. In particular, to stumble upon the literature of the economic growth and democracy community is to be surprised by its coherence and maturity. Why is there nothing like it in the food and nutrition community? We hope that this paper has helped to introduce the latter community to the former. Second, there is the potential for looking at existing problems with a fresh perspective. For example, there is the intriguing possibility of reducing gender asymmetries not by directing more resources to women, but simply by guaranteeing them rights of access to, or ownership of, resources that they may or may not avail themselves of. Third, there are the challenges and opportunities posed by the human rights literature to the policy research process itself. In each of these areas, we have selected only a few examples to highlight our points; no doubt there are many other that we could have used.

[4] The nutrition literature is stronger on understanding the institutional reasons behind the success and failure of interventions. Recent work in the area of operations research is an example of an increased focus on "what works in practice" (Ruel, Arévalo, and Martorell 1995).

This, then, points to another conclusion, namely that the elements of the human rights approach are already interwoven into many areas of food and nutrition policy research and analysis. Issues of agricultural sustainability, gender inequalities, property rights, and famine and information are all examples of where a human rights approach already has had an influence on thinking and perceptions. By exposing these influences in a diverse set of food and nutrition areas, we hope the paper will result in additional food and nutrition issues benefitting from being cast under a human rights lens.

Finally, we conclude that the human rights approach as it applies to food and nutrition policy issues still constitutes a fairly blunt set of tools. This could be seen in a positive light—after all, what could be a more powerful rallying call for effective development assistance than a broad claim that everyone has the right to a standard of living that is adequate for good health? The problem with this lack of specificity is that human rights attain the same status as "motherhood and apple pie"—something that is hard to argue the virtues of, but which is easy to overlook. It is true that the human rights approach helps us to focus on freedom of information, freedom of association, ethics, democracy, participation, civil society, governance of a wide range of institutions, and gender asymmetries, but one cannot help feel that the approach could be even more helpful if it could be applied in a more discriminating way. No doubt this sentiment partly reflects our inability to use the framework more incisively, but we feel that the increased use of the approach as applied to real policy issues and program will enrich both its foundation and its sharpness as a policy tool for future policy research.

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